

2-28-1945

## Notes: Lenten Address: Question and Answer (Matthew 27:22-29), 1945

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Valparaiso, Feb. 28, 1945.

1. One of the students at the U. - large attendance at these Lenten services - possible reasons - suggested: the beauty of the services with their ~~lyric~~ beloved hymns, the singing of the choirs, the soft light of candles taking us up & away from the hard noise of day-by-day living - the perennial attraction of the most dramatic story in all the world's literature - one of these, or all of these, draw us to this Church every week for a spiritual experience which will remain a warm & living memory in all the years to come -
2. And yet, I would like to think, that there is something else which draws us here week after week - beyond the beauty of the service, beyond the dramatic story, beyond candles & music - ~~the realization, however shadowy & dim,~~ that here, [every Wed. eve] - we are face to face with something cosmic & universal & at the same time ~~something~~ intrinsically & eternally personal - something which strikes all of us - something which determines our own life & destiny - the key to all human experience, the last & greatest vision of God, the ultimate shame and the ultimate glory of the entire human family - G.B.S.: "Today more than ever, whatever things grow dark and God's ways seem difficult to understand, when our own minds are puzzled & confound, people gather at Calvary, stand & look - You and I know that isn't enough, but at least it's a beginning - & God knows we need that -"
3. And so tonight - in our own <sup>inner</sup> journey, along the Way of Sorrows to the Cross - we come to the judgment hall of the Roman governor of the province of Syria - our lord already condemned by the representatives of a dead Church - now a blind government - at this point

I

We shall do that for a few

very moments - pick the

TEXT

THEME

story of Calvary up to a

OCCASION

major turn - X standing

before Pilate, the

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Roman governor

X a major turn in the story. Until now the actors had been, "a small group - the priests, the band of soldiers, the Sanhedrin, the witnesses - but now - the whole human race is represented in the crowd which has gathered before Pilate's judgment hall - all of us, if you please - the people of the cities and towns & villages of the Mediterranean world - the human family - you & I -

4. Against this background of a watching humanity, the trial before Pilate proceeds - no time this evening for all the details - the ebb and flow of deep dark human passions, the hidden struggle between Church & State so often repeated, the tragic blindness & cruelty of the mob, & above it all the divine irony of the entire procedure - God shaping the event so that it fitted into His purpose for the hearts of men & the momentary success of the powers of evil becomes the eternal victory of God -

5. The entire meaning of the scene - summed up & crystallized in the two brief <sup>sentences</sup> [I read a few moments ago] - they contain one question & two answers - the question must be asked by every man & woman on the face of the earth - every last person who has been or will be born into the world - in <sup>prayer</sup> or in desperation: "What shall I?" You all remember how Pilate asked it - at the end of long hours of twisting and turning in the hope that he would be able to remain neutral - avoid a decision - get rid of the silent prisoner in whose eyes were all the haunting and forgetful years - sent Him to Herod - offered to scourge Him and let Him go - played his last trick by setting Jesus beside Barabbas.

7. Nothing worked! No matter how He tried - there was the mob - and there was the prisoner - and so He found

Great question  
6.  
Pilate's  
moment

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Himself at last, as so many uncounted millions have since that first Good Friday morning, face to face with the inevitable, unavoidable, inescapable Christ - the proud Roman governor turns to the crowd - there is a note of desperation in His voice: "What shall I do then?" I cannot get away from Him. What am I to do with Him? He haunts me. What shall I do with Him?"

8. Ah, Pilate that's the question - greater than Hamlet's "to be or not to be" - greater than any question in life & time - the last & highest question before every human heart - (also yours & mine) - what to do with the inevitable, unavoidable, inescapable Christ. Remember Francis Thompson, London gutter - would Christ follow Him there? Remember his lines:

I fled Him, down the nights & down the days  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from him, and under running laughter  
But with unhurrying chase  
And unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy  
They beat - and a voice beat  
More instant than the feet -

"All things betray thee, who betrayest me."

9. (Is it perhaps someone <sup>there perhaps someone too</sup> of us here tonight in whose heart that voice beats - so that we too must ask the question: "What shall I do then? I have tried to escape from Him, to lose Him, to forget Him - but I just can't. He will not let me go. He is inescapable. What shall I do then with Jesus?"

Great ~~question~~ "What shall I do?"

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10. That first Good Friday - two answers - the first came quickly: "Crucify Him." Kill Him. That's always a good way to get rid of a man - eliminate him - get him out of the way - <sup>you</sup> know enough history to realize that sometimes it works - but only with bad men - never with good men - and never, never with Christ - He has a way of going on beyond trials, defeat, death - & when the world thinks it has rid itself of Him - He is still standing there - the inevitable, unavoidable, inescapable Christ - [Zola]
11. But <sup>really</sup> we will not give that answer "Crucify Him" - I wonder - true, not so blatantly & obviously as the mob - but in a thousand ways we may whisper - 20<sup>th</sup> "Crucify Him" - thought-forming again to the ways of sin - by wandering off into the mists of doubt & indifference - by hating & fighting - by all the thousand wrong pathways our hearts go crying down - <sup>do not</sup> say again & again "Crucify Him" - the more hount we are with ourselves, the more readily will we admit that we have often taken our place with the mob - that we have cried for His blood - that we have answered the question: "What shall I do" with the perennial cry of the stupid human heart "Crucify Him".
12. And now we can turn the posters - only when we penitently confess that at times we have cried "Crucify Him" can we turn to the full glory of the other answer to our question - it is dimly foreshadowed by the mocking soldiers who pressed the crown of thorns upon His brow, knelt down before Him, and cried: "Hail King of the Jews" - as so often in the ways of God with men they speak more truly than they know - Hail, King.

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Music

Yes, He was and is a King - not only of the Jews,  
<sup>but</sup> of all the nations of the earth - of all the rolling  
 years - of all the events of history - of every human  
 soul - of your heart and mine. <sup>primarily</sup> This is the only  
 true - and eternally true - answer to the question: "What  
 shall I do then?" - He is my God and my King -  
 a King reigning from a Cross - a King who <sup>asks</sup> <sup>needs</sup>  
 our undying faith, our complete loyalty, our unflinching  
 obedience - a King who rules in mercy and in peace.  
 but Who rules - Whose Kingdom shall have no end -  
<sup>and</sup> ~~What~~ He shall reign forever & ever -

13. And ~~here~~ <sup>and</sup> our story ~~ends~~ - what happens <sup>for himself</sup> now is our  
 business - each one of us must choose <sup>one</sup> of the two  
 answers to the question: "What shall I?" And if you  
 answer "I shall own Him as my God and my King"  
 my Savior & Redeemer - then I can promise you  
 again ~~that~~ that into your life will come a new  
 joy & a new hope and a new courage - & the  
 supreme happiness of walking toward your journey's  
 end with Him Who is the captain of your  
 destiny & the master of your soul - your King!

So I  
 pray you  
 will